

[Mr. Tom Morgan]

1

Folkstuff Rangelore

Range-lore

Nellie B. Cox

San Angelo

Page one

RANGE-LORE

Mr. Tom Morgan, or "Uncle Tom," as he is familiarly called, has served many years as a Texas Ranger on the Mexican border. He was reared in all the traditions of the ranger service, for his father and his uncle served as rangers in the earliest days of the organization, to protect the Texas frontier from Indian [depredations?]. Mr. Morgan tells:

"My father came to Texas in 1849, and to the western part of the state in 1855. Mother's family came a year later and father and mother were married in 1860, being the second couple to be married in what is now Coleman County. Mother used to tell that the Indians at first were not feared. They came on moonlight nights and stole the horses but did not kill until they realized they were being run out of their own country, then they began to kill, burn and pillage. C12 - 2/11/41 Texas 2 These Indians would stand on the mountains and watch where a settler hobbled out his horses then when the moon came up, they came and stole the horses. Many times the settlers, for the benefit of any watching Indians, would turn the horses out in front of the house, then at dark, move them to another grazing place and thus outwit the thieving savages. Mother told that many times when father

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was away, she had watched through the cracks of her log house as the Indians prowled around, taking anything and everything but especially the horses.

“My father's home was on Jim Ned Creek and about 40 miles away at the mouth of the Concho, lived their nearest neighbor, Rich Coffey. Rich was a fine fellow and always joking. Early one morning, Rich walked out to drive in the milk cows. Three Indians spied him and began chasing him. Rich was a big fellow but ran his best to reach the house. His wife stood in the door, wringing her hands and calling, 'Run, Rich, run!' Coffey reached the door, fell headlong into the house and when he got up he said, 'wife, you don't think I throwed off in that race, do you?'

“My father, uncle and other members of that early ranger organization were commissioned to protect the frontier but when the war (Civil) started General [McCord?] took them all to serve in the army. They got as far as Houston and then went no farther but said they were going back, that they were rangers under orders from the state of Texas, that their duty was on the frontier protecting the settlers and back they came and never served as soldiers in the conflict. 3 “One incident I remember my father telling of the days when he was serving as ranger was this: They were making their way home for Christmas but a big snow and other unfortunate circumstances delayed them, and late Christmas Eve found them near Santa Anna Mountains. 'Well, boys,' said the captain, 'looks like we won't make it in home, but we can have turkey for Christmas dinner,' so he sent my father and my uncle over on Cow Creek to shoot some wild turkeys. As they walked along in the dusk, my father's quick ear caught a slight crunch in the snow behind him. Turning, he saw an Indian a step behind him with a long, murderous knife upraised, ready to plunge it into my father's back. Father, not having time to get his gun, turned in his tracks and grappled with the Indian. They fell to the ground and after a terrific struggle, father killed the Indian with the knife that had been intended for him.

“For many years I worked on ranches, being for a long time wagon boss on the U ranch. I have been up the trail many times. My brother and I drove the last big herd that was sent

Library of Congress

out. We took 1800 big steers to what is now Ochiltree County but then it was 'No Man's Land,' a strip of land that at that time was claimed by both Texas and Indian Territory. We took that herd in 1894.

"When I was serving on the ranger force on the border in 1916 there occurred this incident at Glenn Springs in Brewster County. Now, it is just a supposition that these were Pancho Villa's outlaws and not Mexican Federals who came over into the 4 little town in Brewster County and shot up the town. There were some American soldiers stationed there and they fought back. There are holes in the walls of those adobe buildings yet that were made by the bullets. The Mexicans killed two Americans, I think, but anyhow they took two white men and a negro as captives, and also one of the trucks belonging to the soldiers. When they got across the river, back into Mexico, the outlaws separated, part going on horseback up one draw, but the Mexican captain and lieutenant (the other Mexicans called them by these titles) were in the stolen truck with the two Americans and the negro. After they got the truck about a mile up the road, the truck stalled, apparently. The American driving the truck called to the other boy and the negro in the back 'You'll have to get out and push.' They did and the car started but after a short distance they stalled again and try as they would, the white boy and the negro could not start it. The Mexican captain ordered the lieutenant out to push. All their combined efforts couldn't start that stalled truck, so the driver said 'Captain, you'll just have to get out and help.' When they all got out to push, the Americans grabbed the Mexicans' guns, covered them and marched them back across the river to Sanderson where the Mexicans were put in jail. Not a shot was fired for the bunch who had gone up the other draw would have heard, but they went on knowing nothing of what had happened. I do not know what disposition was made of the Mexicans who were put in jail. Some 5 disapproved of the whole proceedings, saying that the Mexicans had been brought back by force but they never seemed to think how the Americans had been forced to go into Mexico.

"Another time the Mexican bandit leader and his men came across the river and stole some horses and took them back across the river with them. Captain Bates, myself and

Library of Congress

four other rangers, two citizens and two or three soldiers were going across to get the horses for we knew where the Mexican bandit and his bunch were hanging out. We said to the sergeant (American soldier) 'Sergeant [Scratch?], come go with us. You'll have some fun. We are not going to fight- just going to bring back those horses.' 'No,' said Sergeant Scratch, 'I don't want to get court-martialed' but two or three little soldiers did go along. There was only one trail for a long way along the river on the other side and this was called 'Smugglers' Trail.' We followed this trail until we were nearly to the 'hangout' of the bandit, Pablo Domingues. There we separated, some of the party, going up the hill and coming in to the back of the shack and the remainder coming up in front. The house was built of sotol. (A plant native to the southwest- having a cabbage- like root often fed to stock and tall, reedy stalks- [N?].B.C.). Farther back, across a small sag, was a small adobe house.

"When we surrounded the sotol house, one of the rangers called, 'Pablo, come out.' 'No, senor,' he answered but a woman did come out and run across to the adobe. We didn't know but what the house was full of bandits and we couldn't see inside the shack but they could see us plainly in the early morning light. All at once, though, those in front, did see the opening of a gun barrel, pushed through the walls. When the gun fired, the ranger standing by me, fell, shot through the arm, the bullet then passing into the center of his body and tearing it open. I saw him fall and watched the pallor come over his face. Then, as if from a signal, we all began to pour bullets into that sotol shack. Even during those moments, I was noticing the two little soldiers, sitting by the wall of the adobe, shooting and wondered why they didn't at least get around the corner and shoot from there where they would have some protection.

"There came a lull in the firing- we had stopped to reload- when out of the house ran Pablo. He was wounded and carried his rifle held close to his body with his forearm, his hand dangling. Just as he reached the sag near the adobe, several bullets sped after him. One found its mark. He jumped high in the air- fell- and was still.

Library of Congress

"We then searched the houses, finding nothing but ammunition in the sotol house. In the adobe were several women and one ole Mexican man, but there was evidence showing where the other bandits had crawled out a little window and down the bank to the hiding place of their horses.

"The woman who had run out of the house where Pablo had been, kept smiling as we searched and that got me, and I said to the captain, 'I don't see anything to be smiling about here' 7 but at that time she didn't know Pablo had been killed.

"We brought up our horses, and I put my slain friend in the saddle in front of me and started back across the river. When we were ready to go, we told the Mexicans that they had better come and get Pablo and that was the first they knew that he was lying in that sag- dead.

"After we crossed back into Texas, we were, I guess, nearly a hundred miles from any communication and back here it was reported that we were missing in Mexico. Rhome Shields- bless his good, old heart- said, 'Boys, we'll go down there and get them if we look all over Mexico.'

"Two of my sons were already in service in the World War then and my wife had signed the [papers?] for the other two sons to enter. Can you imagine her feelings when she heard the reports of our party being captured?

"We did not go over into Mexico to fight, but to try to bring back the property of our American citizens who had suffered much from the Mexican outlaws and bandits.

"I have lived through many stirring times, but as long as my mother lived, we always went home at Christmas.

"My wife is a double Gold Star Mother. One of our sons died in actual service and the other one died soon after he got back to us, but she and I are carrying on." Range-lore

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Tom Morgan, San Angelo, Texas. Interviewed May 1, 1938.